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ABSTRACT

Decades of research indicates that when parents take an active part in their children's education, it has a positive impact on their children's academic achievement, attitudes toward learning and school, confidence as a learner, and their social behavior. Parents can also help children develop the lifelong learning skills and attitudes they will need in a rapidly changing society. This booklet examines lifelong learning, and provides suggestions for learning activities for parents to engage in with their preschool- and kindergarten-age children. Part 1 of the booklet, "Background Information," defines lifelong learning, explains why it is important, and details the characteristics of a lifelong learner with regard to attitudes, learning skills, and an understanding of their own learning styles. Part 2, "Learning Activities for Parents and Children," provides specific ideas for parents to work directly with their preschool and kindergarten children in the areas of learning styles; development of positive attitudes toward learning; reading; writing; speaking; and listening. Also included are suggestions for getting children ready to learn the research skills, learning strategies, and higher-order thinking skills they will need later on. Part 3 of the booklet lists resources for parents, including availability information. (KB)

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Booklet 1

Lifelong Learning Skills for the Preschool/Kindergarten Child Tips for Parents

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March 1998

R e s e a r c h
Y o u C a n U s e
L i f e l o n g
L e a r n i n g

Booklet 1

Lifelong Learning Skills
for the
Preschool/Kindergarten Child
Tips for Parents

Kathleen Cotton



Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

School Improvement Program

Robert E. Blum, Director

Parents: You Can Help Your Child Learn

Decades of research have shown that when parents take an active part in their children's education, it has a very positive effect on

- Academic achievement
- Attitudes toward school and learning
- Self-confidence as a learner
- Social behavior

Parents can support their children's learning in many ways: by attending school functions, participating in parent-teacher conferences, serving on school councils, volunteering in the classroom, and tutoring their children at home.

All these kinds of support are beneficial, but research shows that **children benefit most when parents work directly with them on learning activities at home.**

Research also shows that

- Parents do not have to be highly educated or have a lot of free time in order to help their children learn.
- The earlier a child's parents get involved in his or her education, the more good it does.

Training given to parents by the school often helps them to be more effective in helping their children learn. If your child's school offers training to parents, by all means take advantage of it.

Table of Contents

MESSAGE TO PARENTS	ii
OTHER RESOURCES IN THIS SERIES	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	v
PART 1: BACKGROUND INFORMATION	1
PART 2: LEARNING ACTIVITIES FOR PARENTS AND CHILDREN	
Learning Styles	5
Positive Attitudes Toward Learning	6
Reading	8
Writing	9
Speaking and Listening	10
Other Skills	11
HELPFUL RESOURCES FOR PARENTS	13

Other Resources In This Series

You may be interested in getting the other booklets
in this Lifelong Learning series:

- *Lifelong Learning Skills for the Elementary School Child:
Tips for Parents* (Booklet 2)
- *Lifelong Learning Skills for the Middle/Junior High School
Student: Tips for Parents* (Booklet 3)
- *From High School Student to Lifelong Learner: Your Route
to Independence* (Booklet 4)

and for teachers and principals

- *Education for Lifelong Learning: Literature Synthesis*
(Booklet 5)

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Part 1:

Background Information

Research
You Can Use
Lifelong
Learning

Lifelong Learning Skills for the Preschool/Kindergarten Child: Tips for Parents is one of a series of booklets about **lifelong learning**.

It explains what lifelong learning is, why it is important, and what kinds of personal traits, knowledge, and skills it requires.

It also makes clear that preparation for lifelong learning needs to begin during your child's preschool and kindergarten years.

Following this introductory material, you will find many activities you can use with your child to help build the positive learning attitudes and readiness he or she will need for developing lifelong learning skills.

To some extent, lifelong learning happens naturally. Throughout our lives, we take in information and merge it with what we already know. We also acquire new skills as we go through life.

Many of us also learn new things more systematically—for example, by receiving training at work or taking a community college class.

Until recently, however, most of us have not *had* to make a concentrated and lifelong effort to increase our knowledge and skills. So we may not have developed the attitudes and specific skills needed for lifelong learning.

Now, things are changing. Today's students may have no choice but to become lifelong learners in order to be successful.

We hear a lot these days about the "information explosion." More information is being produced than ever before, and new technologies continue to make this information more widely available.

< About this booklet



< What is lifelong learning?

< Why is lifelong learning so important?

In most fields of study, information and knowledge are doubling every three to ten years, and a lot of existing information is becoming obsolete.

Work environments are changing rapidly. Today's students can expect to switch—not just *jobs*, but *entire careers*—four or five times during their working lives.

Business and industry leaders talk about needing a new kind of worker, one who can gather, sort, interpret, evaluate, and apply large amounts of information. These workers will need to be more self-reliant and depend less on supervisors to solve problems and make decisions.

Technology has not simplified work. What it has done is to eliminate many low-level jobs and increase the skill levels needed for the jobs that remain.

What makes a >
person a lifelong
learner?

What kinds of attitudes and skills prepare people for successful lifelong learning?

Let's take **attitudes** first. Attitudes of lifelong learners include

Attitudes >

- Curiosity and interest in learning new things
- Confidence in their ability to learn
- Motivation for seeking new learning opportunities
- Willingness to be responsible for their own learning
- Willingness to make mistakes and learn from them
- Persistence in tasks
- Openness to constructive criticism
- Patience

Lifelong learners also have an assortment of learning **skills**, including

Skills >

- *Reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills* that make it possible for them to take in information and express it to others.
- *Research and independent learning skills*, such as being aware of what they need to learn; making and following a learning plan; and identifying, retrieving, and organizing information.
- *Study skills and learning strategies* to understand and remember the new information they acquire.

- *Higher-order thinking skills*, including critical and creative thinking, problem solving, decision making, and other skills that take them beyond memorizing facts and formulas to understanding what they mean and how to use them.
- *"Thinking-about-thinking" skills*. People with these skills understand that there are different ways of mentally tackling new learning material. They stop and reflect now and then on how well they are understanding what they are trying to learn, and they know how to change their mental strategy if they are not "getting it."

Many skills in these areas do not receive a great deal of attention until students are older. But even preschool and kindergarten children can begin to learn some of them and build readiness for developing the others later on.

In addition to these attitudes and skills, lifelong learners have a good understanding of their *learning styles*—their own best ways of learning. At the beginning of the next section are activities to help you identify and expand your child's learning style.

< Understanding
learning styles



Part 2:

Learning Activities for Parents and Children

Related
You Can Use
Learning
Learning

Learning Styles

A person's learning style includes such things as whether he or she learns best from reading, from studying pictures or diagrams, from listening to an oral description, or from doing hands-on activities or moving about.

It also includes such things as the time of day he or she learns best and the kinds of surroundings he or she prefers to be in when learning.

Preschool and kindergarten children should have the opportunity to experience as many different kinds of toys, games, books, and other learning materials as possible. By joining your child in activities such as the following ones, you can learn a lot about his or her learning style.

Provide photographs, drawings, graphics, and materials for art projects. When your child asks questions, locate or draw illustrative pictures whenever possible to go along with your answers.

Do art projects with your child, and display finished products prominently—on the refrigerator or a bulletin board. When they have been on display for awhile and it's time to take them down to make room for other things, decide with your child which drawings, paintings, etc., he or she wants to put into a scrapbook.

Encourage your child to draw pictures of things that interest him or her. Show interest when your child shows you his or her drawings, saying things such as "Tell me about this part," or "These colors are nice together." Don't stop with "That's nice, dear," which tends to end the conversation. Also, it is better not to ask, "What is it?" which can hurt the child's feelings.



< Show and tell

< Art projects

< Drawing

Research

You Can Use

Lifelong

Learning

Walk and listen »

Go for a walk with your child and make a game of trying to notice and identify as many different sounds as you can.

Imitate sounds »

Make a game of imitating animal noises, common sounds from the environment (such as horns, whistles, sirens, and phone ringing), and sayings associated with particular characters, for example, "Who calls Bugs Bunny a 'wascally wabbit'?"

Watch educational TV »

Join your child in watching educational programs for children as broadcast programs or on videocassette. Ask questions about the "look" of the program (the colors, the story characters, the geometric shapes, and so on) and the audio portion ("What did the man say when the little girl told him his hat was funny?" "Did the owl have a soft voice or a loud voice?" etc.).

Listen to recordings »

Buy or borrow from friends or the local library recordings for young children. Those featuring characters from Disney and Sesame Street, for example, are popular with children and often teach as well as entertain. Join with your child in singing along with the recordings.

Positive Attitudes Toward Learning

What parents can do »

The habits, attitudes, and general outlook of a lifelong learner begin to be developed during the first years of life.

Those who study lifelong learners find that they usually had parents who

- Held high expectations for their school achievement and behavior.
- Warmly encouraged them to work hard and do their best.
- Were careful *not* to compare their children's performance with that of other children or try to get them to improve by threatening or punishing them.
- Made plenty of books, magazines and other reading material available.

- Spent time reading nearly every day. Parents can say that reading and learning are important in life, but it is much more convincing if the children see that their parents make time for reading and learning in their own lives.

If you send your child to preschool or kindergarten, you are encouraged to choose a setting that emphasizes play, exploration, and social relationships among children, rather than teaching reading or math.

Research shows that requiring very small children to do formal academic work actually *reduces* their motivation for learning later on.

Early childhood specialists recommend the kind of preschool kindergarten curriculum that gets children *ready* for first grade, but does not ask them to do first grade work. Whether or not your child attends preschool or kindergarten, the activities in this section can help to arouse his or her interest in learning.

Take a look at the following suggestions for helping your child build positive attitudes and learning skills. It is not necessary to do all of these things; instead, select and try those that you can and want to do.

Encourage exploration by giving your child lots of interesting objects to look at and handle. Make available toys and equipment that call for walking, running, and climbing; these are good for whole-body coordination. Furnish blocks, clay, paints, and crayons to increase eye-hand coordination.

Play with your child and show that you take pleasure in being with him or her. Make playtime a combination of activities initiated by your child and others initiated by you.

Praise your child's efforts and accomplishments and display his or her paintings and drawings on the walls or refrigerator.

To stimulate your child's imagination and creativity, read and tell stories. "Play-act" stories, using "costumes" of old clothes or sheets, if available.

< Choosing a preschool or kindergarten



< Exploration

< Play together

< Praise and display work

< Stories

Reading



Point out words >

Use voices;
record and share >

Answer questions >

Fill in the blanks >

"Pretend" reading >

Hang posters/drawings >

Alphabet >

If we ask what is the most important skill students need to develop in school, most people would agree that it is *reading*—and they would be right. Success in school and in most jobs depends on the ability to read.

Many tasks of everyday life also require reading skills. Examples include following directions, buying or selling items through the classified ads, looking for work, understanding personal or business mail, and filling out forms.

First and foremost, you are encouraged to read to your child—every day, if possible, and for at least ten minutes at a time. Many parents find bedtime a good time for reading to children, but any time that fits into your schedule is good.

When your child is about four, occasionally point to words as you read them, so that he or she begins to understand that written words have meaning in them.

Read stories and poems with your child, using different voices for different characters. If you have a tape recorder, record these reading sessions to enjoy listening to later or to send to relatives.

Allow your child to ask questions during the reading of a story; he or she may be misunderstanding an event or idea that is clear to you.

When your child gets to know a story well, but still wants you to read it, pause occasionally and let the child "fill in the blanks."

If your child likes to pretend to read by holding a book and repeating parts he or she knows well, encourage this; it is an important step in learning how to read.

Make and hang posters of the alphabet on your child's bedroom wall. Also, label your child's drawings and display them.

Have your child look for letters of the alphabet on cans and boxes of food and household supplies, starting with common letters and building up to harder-to-find ones.

Look at newspapers and magazines with your child. Identify interesting pictures and read their captions out loud, pointing to the words as you read them.

< Newspapers/magazines

Visit the library with your child. You should each have your own library card. Select books together from the children's section for your child, and check out a book or two for yourself as well. Meet the librarian and ask about the library's programs for children.

< Use the library

Ask other parents what books their children especially enjoy, and see if these interest your child.

< Ask other parents

Writing

Preschool children can get ready to learn to write by learning that writing is a common and important part of life.

Make sure your child sees you make out shopping or other "to-do" lists. Say the words aloud as you print them.

< Lists

As with pretending to read, pretending to write is good preparation for learning to write later on; encourage your child when he or she does "pretend writing" and then "reads" it to you.

< "Pretend writing"

Have your child tell a story and write the words down as he or she is telling it. This will help your child to learn how stories are written. Then read the story back to your child. You may also want to display the story for others to see.

< Story telling

Have your child tell you about someone he or she likes, while you write what he or she says about the person. Ask encouraging questions: "Where do you see this person?" "What kinds of games do you play together?" Read the description to your child and find out if he or she wants to change it or add to it.

< Describe a person

Join your child in writing and drawing on the sidewalk or driveway with chalk.

< Outdoor writing with chalk

Speaking and Listening

Speaking and listening skills will remain important throughout your child's life—for getting the most out of lessons, answering questions, communicating with merchants, and following directions, to name just a few situations where these skills are needed.

You can help your child develop these skills during everyday activities.

Conversations >

Beginning when your child is small, have conversations with him or her to help build skill in expressing ideas fluently.

High-interest topics >

Help your child develop listening skills by speaking about things he or she is interested in.

School activities >

Ask your child to tell you about field trips or other school activities. Give encouragement by asking questions, such as, "And then what happened?" "What was the best part?"

Encourage questions >

Encourage your child to ask questions about things he or she sees and hears. Ask your child questions, too—about what he or she did at school or daycare, about friends, or about special activities. Rather than asking what he or she did in school today, ask more specific questions, such as "Did you do art projects today? What did you make—or begin working on?"

Television as conversation starter >

Use family television viewing as a starting point for conversation. Following a program you have watched together, ask your child some "what if" questions: "What would you do if you were the girl in the story?" "If you had to hide like the people in the story, where would you hide—and why?"

Good listener >

Be a good listener when your child talks to you; this is the most powerful thing you can do to help your child become a good listener. And let your child know you appreciate it when he or she listens carefully and follows directions.

Play "what if" games with your child by asking questions such as, "What if you could fly?" "What if it stopped getting dark at night?" "What if our cat could talk?" etc. Encourage your child's powers of imagination and description by asking additional questions, such as "Would it be hard to sleep if it didn't get dark?" "Would the birds know when to chirp or be quiet?"

< What if...?



Other Skills

There are other things, too, that you can do to help your child get ready to learn the research skills, learning strategies, and higher-level thinking skills he or she will need to master later on.

Teach your child nursery rhymes and songs to help him or her remember names, numbers, body parts, colors, and so on. Using shelves or boxes for toys and art materials teaches organization.

< Learning strategies

After you finish reading a story, ask your child what he or she thinks the story's characters might do next, or whether he or she can think of a different ending. These "open-ended" questions are good preparation for building critical and creative thinking skills.

< Higher-order thinking

By taking your preschool child to the library regularly and getting to know the children's librarian, he or she will be learning that libraries are friendly, helpful places.

< Research and library skills

Allow your child to have some control over things that affect him or her directly. For example, let him or her choose what to wear, how to assemble building-set pieces, and what to have for lunch (all within reason, of course!).

< Independent learning

Doing activities from this booklet with your preschool or kindergarten child can prepare him or her for success in school and for building more advanced skills for lifelong learning.

Other useful resources are listed on the following pages.

Helpful Resources for Parents

Some of the following resources contain activities you can do with your preschool or kindergarten child. Others contain ideas for supporting the learning of older children.

*American Association of School Administrators. *Brush Up Your Study Skills: Tips for Students and Parents*. Arlington, VA: AASA, 1995 (ED 381 910).

American Federation of Teachers/U.S. Department of Education. "Make Reading a Family Affair: Help Parents Help Their Children Become Lifelong Readers." *American Educator* 17/4 (Winter 1993-94): 32-43.

Available from AFT Order Department, 555 New Jersey Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20001, 1-800-238-1133. Ask for item 350. 1-9 copies: \$.50 each; 10 or more copies: \$.40 each.

*Amundson, K. *101 Ways Parents Can Help Students Achieve*. Arlington, VA: American Association of School Administrators, 1991 (ED 346 973).

*Arizona State Department of Education. *Learning Activities Parents Can Do With Their Children*. Phoenix, AZ: Arizona State Department of Education, 1989 (ED 321 898).

*Association of American Publishers. *Helping Your Child Succeed in School*. New York: Association of American Publishers—School Division, 1989 (ED 350 077).

Available from Association of American Publishers, School Division, 220 East 23rd St., New York, NY 10010. \$1.50 for single copy; \$1.25 each for 10-99 copies; \$1.00 each for 100 or more copies.

Ban, J. R. *Parents Assuring Student Success (PASS): Achievement Made Easy by Learning Together*. Bloomington, IN: National Educational Service, 1993.

Available from National Educational Service, PO Box 8, Department V2, Bloomington, IN 47402-0008m 800-733-6786. \$21.95 (shipping/handling charges waived if prepaid; if not, \$3.00 minimum or 7%).

*Cano, L. R. *Helping Your Child Learn: A Parent's Guide = Ayudando a Su Hijo a Aprender: Una Guía para los Padres*. Houston, TX: Southwestern Bell Telephone Company, August 1988 (ED 281 966).

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Dreilinger, M., and Kerner, R. *How to Help Children Succeed in School*. Plainview, NY: The Family Forum Library, Bureau for At-Risk Youth, 1992.

Available from Bureau for At-Risk Youth, PO Box 760, Plainview, NY 11803-0760, 1-800-99-YOUTH. \$1.95 each, ISBN 1-56688-007-6.

Giacobbe, A.; Osborne M.; and Woods, D. B. "Building a Family Learning Environment." Unit Two in *Parent and Family Involvement*. Washington, DC: American Federation of Teachers, Educational Research and Dissemination Program, 1996.

Available from Educational Research and Dissemination Program, Educational Issues Department, American Federation of Teachers, 555 New Jersey Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20001.

Jones, C. *More Parents Are Teachers, Too: Encouraging Your 6- to 12-Year-Old*. Charlotte, VT: Williamson Publishing Co., 1990.

Available from Williamson Publishing Co., PO Box 185, Charlotte, VT 05445, 1-800-234-8791. \$9.95.

*Ramos, N., and Santos, R. S. *Helping Your Children Succeed in School: A Parent's Guide*. San Antonio, TX: San Antonio I.S.D.; Texas A and I University, Spring 1988 (ED 329 370).

*Reyes, M., and Rothman, D. *Parents as Partners: Planning Early for your Children's School Success and College Attendance. Revised Edition = Los Padres como Socios: Planificando para el Exito Escolar y la Asistencia al Colegio de Sus Ninos. Edicion Revisada*. Sacramento: California State Department of Education; California State University, 1995 (ED 381 254).

*Rich, D. *Summer Home Learning Recipes for Parents and Children, Grades: K-3, 4-6, 6-8, 9-12*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 1994 (ED 371 907).

*Shefelbine, J. *Parents Sharing Books: Motivation and Reading*. Bloomington, IN: Family Literacy Center, Indiana University, 1990 (ED 324 662).

**Spanish Language Briefs for Parents, 1995*. Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, 1995 (ED 390 630).

U.S. Department of Education. *Learning Partners: A Guide to Educational Activities for Families*. Washington, DC: Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, May 1997.

Available in English and Spanish from National Library of Education, 555 New Jersey Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20208-5721. Or call 1-800-424-1616. Free.

*Vogler, D. E., and Hutchins, D. E. *Parents as Tutors: Minimizing the Homework Hassle*. Alexandria, VA: National Community Education Association, 1988 (ED 338 999).

Available from National Community Education Association, 801 N. Fairfax St., Suite 209, Alexandria, VA 22314. \$6.95 each; quantity discounts.